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PART 46—IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT OF 1969

Authority: 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.* (The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended); Executive Order 11514, (Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality (March 5, 1970, as amended by Executive Order 11991, May 24, 1977)); 40 CFR parts 1500-1508 (43 FR 55978) (National Environmental Policy Act, Implementation of Procedural Provisions).

Source: 73 FR 61314, Oct. 15, 2008, unless otherwise noted.

Subpart A—General Information

§ 46.10 Purpose of this part.

- (a) This part establishes procedures for the Department, and its constituent bureaus, to use for compliance with:
 - (1) The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*); and
 - (2) The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500-1508).
- (b) Consistent with 40 CFR 1500.3, it is the Department's intention that any trivial violation of these regulations will not give rise to any independent cause of action.

§ 46.20 How to use this part.

- (a) This part supplements, and is to be used in conjunction with, the CEQ regulations except where it is inconsistent with other statutory requirements. The following table shows the corresponding CEQ regulations for the sections in subparts A–E of this part. Some sections in those subparts do not have a corresponding CEQ regulation.

Subpart A 40 CFR

46.10 Parts 1500-1508

46.20 No corresponding CEQ regulation

46.30 No corresponding CEQ regulation

Subpart B

46.100 1508.14, 1508.18, 1508.23

46.105 1506.5

46.110 No corresponding CEQ regulation

46.115 1508.7

46.120 1502.9, 1502.20, 1502.21, 1506.3

46.125 1502.22

46.130 1502.14

46.135 1502.21

46.140 1502.20

46.145 No corresponding CEQ regulation

46.150 1506.11

46.155 1502.25, 1506.2

46.160 1506.1

46.170 No corresponding CEQ regulation

Subpart C

46.200 1501.2

46.205 1508.4

46.210 1508.4

46.215 1508.4

46.220 1501.5

46.225 1501.6

46.230 1501.6

46.235 1501.7

46.240 1501.8

Subpart D

46.300 1501.3

46.305 1501.7, 1506.6

46.310 1508.9

46.315 No corresponding CEQ regulation

46.320 1506.3

46.325 1501.4

Subpart E

46.400 1502.5

46.405 1502.7

46.415 1502.10

46.420 1502.14

46.425 1502.14

46.430 1502.25

46.435 1503

46.440 1506.2

46.445 1506.8

46.450 1505.2

- (b) The Responsible Official will ensure that the decision making process for proposals subject to this part includes appropriate NEPA review.
- (c) During the decision making process for each proposal subject to this part, the Responsible Official shall consider the relevant NEPA documents, public and agency comments (if any) on those documents, and responses to those comments, as part of consideration of the proposal and, except as specified in paragraphs 46.210(a) through (j), shall include such documents, including supplements, comments, and responses as part of the administrative file.
- (d) The Responsible Official's decision on a proposed action shall be within the range of alternatives discussed in the relevant environmental document. The Responsible Official's decision may combine elements of alternatives discussed in the relevant environmental document if the effects of such combined elements of alternatives are reasonably apparent from the analysis in the relevant environmental document.
- (e) For situations involving an applicant, the Responsible Official should initiate the NEPA process upon acceptance of an application for a proposed Federal action. The Responsible Official must publish or otherwise provide policy information and make staff available to advise potential applicants of studies or other information, such as costs, foreseeably required for later Federal action.

§ 46.30 Definitions.

For purposes of this part, the following definitions supplement terms defined at 40 CFR parts 1500-1508.

Adaptive management is a system of management practices based on clearly identified outcomes and monitoring to determine whether management actions are meeting desired outcomes; and, if not, facilitating management changes that will best ensure that outcomes are met or re-evaluated. Adaptive management recognizes that knowledge about natural resource systems is sometimes uncertain.

Bureau means bureau, office, service, or survey within the Department of the Interior.

Community-based training in the NEPA context is the training of local participants together with Federal participants in the workings of the environmental planning effort as it relates to the local community(ies).

Controversial refers to circumstances where a substantial dispute exists as to the environmental consequences of the proposed action and does not refer to the existence of opposition to a proposed action, the effect of which is relatively undisputed.

Environmental Statement Memoranda (ESM) are a series of instructions issued by the Department's Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance to provide information and explanatory guidance in the preparation, completion, and circulation of NEPA documents.

Environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative required by 40 CFR 1505.2(b) to be identified in a record of decision (ROD), that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources. The environmentally preferable alternative is identified upon consideration and weighing by the Responsible Official of long-term environmental impacts against short-term impacts in evaluating what is the best protection of these resources. In some situations, such as when different alternatives impact different resources to different degrees, there may be more than one environmentally preferable alternative.

No action alternative.

- (1) This term has two interpretations. First “no action” may mean “no change” from a current management direction or level of management intensity (e.g., if no ground-disturbance is currently underway, no action means no ground-disturbance). Second “no action” may mean “no project” in cases where a new project is proposed for implementation.
- (2) The Responsible Official must determine the “no action” alternative consistent with one of the definitions in paragraph (1) of this definition and appropriate to the proposed action to be analyzed in an environmental impact statement. The no action alternative looks at effects of not approving the action under consideration.

Proposed action. This term refers to the bureau activity under consideration. It includes the bureau's exercise of discretion over a non-Federal entity's planned activity that falls under a Federal agency's authority to issue permits, licenses, grants, rights-of-way, or other common Federal approvals, funding, or regulatory instruments. The proposed action:

- (1) Is not necessarily, but may become, during the NEPA process, the bureau preferred alternative or (in a record of decision for an environmental impact statement, in accordance with 40 CFR 1505.2) an environmentally preferable alternative; and
- (2) Must be clearly described in order to proceed with NEPA analysis.

Reasonably foreseeable future actions include those federal and non-federal activities not yet undertaken, but sufficiently likely to occur, that a Responsible Official of ordinary prudence would take such activities into account in reaching a decision. These federal and non-federal activities that must be taken into account in the analysis of cumulative impact include, but are not limited to, activities for which there are existing decisions, funding, or proposals identified by the bureau. Reasonably foreseeable future actions do not include those actions that are highly speculative or indefinite.

Responsible Official is the bureau employee who is delegated the authority to make and implement a decision on a proposed action and is responsible for ensuring compliance with NEPA.

Subpart B—Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality

§ 46.100 Federal action subject to the procedural requirements of NEPA.

- (a) A bureau proposed action is subject to the procedural requirements of NEPA if it would cause effects on the human environment (40 CFR 1508.14), and is subject to bureau control and responsibility (40 CFR 1508.18). The determination of whether a proposed action is subject to the procedural requirements of NEPA depends on the extent to which bureaus exercise control and responsibility over the proposed action and whether Federal funding or approval are necessary to implement it. If Federal funding is

provided with no Federal agency control as to the expenditure of such funds by the recipient, NEPA compliance is not necessary. The proposed action is not subject to the procedural requirements of NEPA if it is exempt from the requirements of section 102(2) of NEPA.

- (b) A bureau shall apply the procedural requirements of NEPA when the proposal is developed to the point that:
 - (1) The bureau has a goal and is actively preparing to make a decision on one or more alternative means of accomplishing that goal; and
 - (2) The effects of the proposed action can be meaningfully evaluated (40 CFR 1508.23).

§ 46.105 Using a contractor to prepare environmental documents.

A Responsible Official may use a contractor to prepare any environmental document in accordance with the standards of 40 CFR 1506.5(b) and (c). If a Responsible Official uses a contractor, the Responsible Official remains responsible for:

- (a) Preparation and adequacy of the environmental documents; and
- (b) Independent evaluation of the environmental documents after their completion.

§ 46.110 Incorporating consensus-based management.

- (a) Consensus-based management incorporates direct community involvement in consideration of bureau activities subject to NEPA analyses, from initial scoping to implementation of the bureau decision. It seeks to achieve agreement from diverse interests on the goals of, purposes of, and needs for bureau plans and activities, as well as the methods anticipated to carry out those plans and activities. For the purposes of this Part, consensus-based management involves outreach to persons, organizations or communities who may be interested in or affected by a proposed action with an assurance that their input will be given consideration by the Responsible Official in selecting a course of action.
- (b) In incorporating consensus-based management in the NEPA process, bureaus should consider any consensus-based alternative(s) put forth by those participating persons, organizations or communities who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. While there is no guarantee that any particular consensus-based alternative will be considered to be a reasonable alternative or be identified as the bureau's preferred alternative, bureaus must be able to show that the reasonable consensus-based alternative, if any, is reflected in the evaluation of the proposed action and discussed in the final decision. To be selected for implementation, a consensus-based alternative must be fully consistent with NEPA, the CEQ regulations, and all applicable statutory and regulatory provisions, as well as Departmental and bureau written policies and guidance.
- (c) The Responsible Official must, whenever practicable, use a consensus-based management approach to the NEPA process.
- (d) If the Responsible Official determines that the consensus-based alternative, if any, is not the preferred alternative, he or she must state the reasons for this determination in the environmental document.
- (e) When practicing consensus-based management in the NEPA process, bureaus must comply with all applicable laws, including any applicable provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).

§ 46.115 Consideration of past actions in the analysis of cumulative effects.

When considering the effects of past actions as part of a cumulative effects analysis, the Responsible Official must analyze the effects in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.7 and in accordance with relevant guidance issued by the Council on Environmental Quality, such as "The Council on Environmental Quality Guidance Memorandum on Consideration of Past Actions in Cumulative Effects Analysis" dated June 24, 2005, or any superseding Council on Environmental Quality guidance.

§ 46.120 Using existing environmental analyses prepared pursuant to NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations.

- (a) When available, the Responsible Official should use existing NEPA analyses for assessing the impacts of a proposed action and any alternatives. Procedures for adoption or incorporation by reference of such analyses must be followed where applicable.
- (b) If existing NEPA analyses include data and assumptions appropriate for the analysis at hand, the Responsible Official should use these existing NEPA analyses and/or their underlying data and assumptions where feasible.
- (c) An existing environmental analysis prepared pursuant to NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations may be used in its entirety if the Responsible Official determines, with appropriate supporting documentation, that it adequately assesses the environmental effects of the proposed action and reasonable alternatives. The supporting record must include an evaluation of whether new circumstances, new information or changes in the action or its impacts not previously analyzed may result in significantly different environmental effects.
- (d) Responsible Officials should make the best use of existing NEPA documents by supplementing, tiering to, incorporating by reference, or adopting previous NEPA environmental analyses to avoid redundancy and unnecessary paperwork.

§ 46.125 Incomplete or unavailable information.

In circumstances where the provisions of 40 CFR 1502.22 apply, bureaus must consider all costs to obtain information. These costs include monetary costs as well as other non-monetized costs when appropriate, such as social costs, delays, opportunity costs, and non-fulfillment or non-timely fulfillment of statutory mandates.

§ 46.130 Mitigation measures in analyses.

- (a) Bureau proposed action. The analysis of the proposed action and any alternatives must include an analysis of the effects of the proposed action or alternative as well as analysis of the effects of any appropriate mitigation measures or best management practices that are considered. The mitigation measures can be analyzed either as elements of alternatives or in a separate discussion of mitigation.
- (b) Applicant proposals (*i.e.*, bureau decision-making on such proposals is the proposed action). An applicant's proposal presented to the bureau for analysis must include any ameliorative design elements (including stipulations, conditions, or best management practices), required to make the proposal conform to applicable legal requirements, as well as any voluntary ameliorative design element(s). The effects of any mitigation measures other than the ameliorative design elements included in the applicant's proposal must also be analyzed. The analysis of these mitigation measures can be structured as a matter of consideration of alternatives to approving the applicant's proposal or as separate mitigation measures to be imposed on any alternative selected for implementation.

§ 46.135 Incorporation of referenced documents into NEPA analysis.

- (a) The Responsible Official must determine that the analysis and assumptions used in the referenced document are appropriate for the analysis at hand.
- (b) Citations of specific information or analysis from other source documents should include the pertinent page numbers or other relevant identifying information.
- (c) Publications incorporated into NEPA analysis by reference must be listed in the bibliography. Such publications must be readily available for review and, when not readily available, they must be made available for review as part of the record supporting the proposed action.

§ 46.140 Using tiered documents.

A NEPA document that tiers to another broader NEPA document in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.28 must include a finding that the conditions and environmental effects described in the broader NEPA document are still valid or address any exceptions.

- (a) Where the impacts of the narrower action are identified and analyzed in the broader NEPA document, no further analysis is necessary, and the previously prepared document can be used for purposes of the pending action.
- (b) To the extent that any relevant analysis in the broader NEPA document is not sufficiently comprehensive or adequate to support further decisions, the tiered NEPA document must explain this and provide any necessary analysis.
- (c) An environmental assessment prepared in support of an individual proposed action can be tiered to a programmatic or other broader-scope environmental impact statement. An environmental assessment may be prepared, and a finding of no significant impact reached, for a proposed action with significant effects, whether direct, indirect, or cumulative, if the environmental assessment is tiered to a broader environmental impact statement which fully analyzed those significant effects. Tiering to the programmatic or broader-scope environmental impact statement would allow the preparation of an environmental assessment and a finding of no significant impact for the individual proposed action, so long as any previously unanalyzed effects are not significant. A finding of no significant impact other than those already disclosed and analyzed in the environmental impact statement to which the environmental assessment is tiered may also be called a “finding of no *new* significant impact.”

§ 46.145 Using adaptive management.

Bureaus should use adaptive management, as appropriate, particularly in circumstances where long-term impacts may be uncertain and future monitoring will be needed to make adjustments in subsequent implementation decisions. The NEPA analysis conducted in the context of an adaptive management approach should identify the range of management options that may be taken in response to the results of monitoring and should analyze the effects of such options. The environmental effects of any adaptive management strategy must be evaluated in this or subsequent NEPA analysis.

§ 46.150 Emergency responses.

This section applies only if the Responsible Official determines that an emergency exists that makes it necessary to take urgently needed actions before preparing a NEPA analysis and documentation in accordance with the provisions in subparts D and E of this part.

- (a) The Responsible Official may take those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency that are urgently needed to mitigate harm to life, property, or important natural, cultural, or historic resources. When taking such actions, the Responsible Official shall take into account the probable environmental consequences of these actions and mitigate foreseeable adverse environmental effects to the extent practical.
- (b) The Responsible Official shall document in writing the determination that an emergency exists and describe the responsive action(s) taken at the time the emergency exists. The form of that documentation is within the discretion of the Responsible Official.
- (c) If the Responsible Official determines that proposed actions taken in response to an emergency, beyond actions noted in paragraph (a) of this section, are not likely to have significant environmental impacts, the Responsible Official shall document that determination in an environmental assessment and a finding of no significant impact prepared in accordance with this part, unless categorically excluded (see subpart C of this part). If the Responsible Official finds that the nature and scope of the subsequent actions related to the emergency require taking such proposed actions prior to completing an environmental assessment and a finding of no significant impact, the Responsible Official shall consult with the Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance about alternative arrangements for NEPA compliance. The Assistant Secretary, Policy Management and Budget or his/her designee may grant an alternative arrangement. Any alternative arrangement must be documented. Consultation with the Department must be coordinated through the appropriate bureau headquarters.
- (d) The Department shall consult with CEQ about alternative arrangements as soon as possible if the Responsible Official determines that proposed actions, taken in response to an emergency, beyond actions noted in paragraph (a) of this section, are likely to have significant environmental impacts. The Responsible Official shall consult with appropriate bureau headquarters and the Department, about alternative arrangements as soon as the Responsible Official determines that the proposed action is likely to have a significant environmental effect. Such alternative arrangements will apply only to the proposed actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency. Other proposed actions remain subject to NEPA analysis and documentation in accordance with this part.

§ 46.155 Consultation, coordination, and cooperation with other agencies.

The Responsible Official must whenever possible consult, coordinate, and cooperate with relevant State, local, and tribal governments and other bureaus and Federal agencies concerning the environmental effects of any Federal action within the jurisdictions or related to the interests of these entities.

§ 46.160 Limitations on actions during the NEPA analysis process.

During the preparation of a program or plan NEPA document, the Responsible Official may undertake any major Federal action in accordance with 40 CFR 1506.1 when that action is within the scope of, and analyzed in, an existing NEPA document supporting the current plan or program, so long as there is adequate NEPA documentation to support the individual action.

§ 46.170 Environmental effects abroad of major Federal actions.

- (a) In order to facilitate informed decision-making, the Responsible Official having ultimate responsibility for authorizing and approving proposed actions encompassed by the provisions of Executive Order (EO) 12114 shall follow the provisions and procedures of that EO. EO 12114 "represents the United States

government's exclusive and complete determination of the procedural and other actions to be taken by Federal agencies to further the purpose of the National Environmental Policy Act, with respect to the environment outside the United States, its territories and possessions.”

- (b) When implementing EO 12114, bureaus shall coordinate with the Department. The Department shall then consult with the Department of State, which shall coordinate all communications by the Department with foreign governments concerning environmental agreements and other arrangements in implementing EO 12114.

Subpart C—Initiating the NEPA Process

§ 46.200 Applying NEPA early.

- (a) For any potentially major proposed Federal action (40 CFR 1508.23 and 1508.18) that may have potentially significant environmental impacts, bureaus must coordinate, as early as feasible, with:
 - (1) Any other bureaus or Federal agencies, State, local, and tribal governments having jurisdiction by law or special expertise; and
 - (2) Appropriate Federal, State, local, and tribal governments authorized to develop and enforce environmental standards or to manage and protect natural resources or other aspects of the human environment.
- (b) Bureaus must solicit the participation of all those persons or organizations that may be interested or affected as early as possible, such as at the time an application is received or when the bureau initiates the NEPA process for a proposed action.
- (c) Bureaus should provide, where practicable, any appropriate community-based training to reduce costs, prevent delays, and facilitate and promote efficiency in the NEPA process.
- (d) Bureaus should inform private or non-Federal applicants, to the extent feasible, of:
 - (1) Any appropriate environmental information that the applicants must include in their applications; and
 - (2) Any consultation with other Federal agencies, or State, local, or tribal governments that the applicant must accomplish before or during the application process.
- (e) Bureaus must inform applicants as soon as practicable of any responsibility they will bear for funding environmental analyses associated with their proposals.

§ 46.205 Actions categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Categorical Exclusion means a category or kind of action that has no significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. See 40 CFR 1508.4.

- (a) Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, if an action is covered by a Departmental categorical exclusion, the bureau is not required to prepare an environmental assessment (see subpart D of this part) or an environmental impact statement (see subpart E of this part). If a proposed action does not meet the criteria for any of the listed Departmental categorical exclusions or any of the individual bureau categorical exclusions, then the proposed action must be analyzed in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.
- (b) The actions listed in section 46.210 are categorically excluded, Department-wide, from preparation of environmental assessments or environmental impact statements.

- (c) The CEQ Regulations at 40 CFR 1508.4 require agency procedures to provide for extraordinary circumstances in which a normally excluded action may have a significant environmental effect and require additional analysis and action. Section 46.215 lists the extraordinary circumstances under which actions otherwise covered by a categorical exclusion require analyses under NEPA.
 - (1) Any action that is normally categorically excluded must be evaluated to determine whether it meets any of the extraordinary circumstances in section 46.215; if it does, further analysis and environmental documents must be prepared for the action.
 - (2) Bureaus must work within existing administrative frameworks, including any existing programmatic agreements, when deciding how to apply any of the section 46.215 extraordinary circumstances.
- (d) Congress may establish categorical exclusions by legislation, in which case the terms of the legislation determine how to apply those categorical exclusions.

§ 46.210 Listing of Departmental categorical exclusions.

The following actions are categorically excluded under paragraph 46.205(b), unless any of the extraordinary circumstances in section 46.215 apply:

- (a) Personnel actions and investigations and personnel services contracts.
- (b) Internal organizational changes and facility and bureau reductions and closings.
- (c) Routine financial transactions including such things as salaries and expenses, procurement contracts (e.g., in accordance with applicable procedures and Executive Orders for sustainable or green procurement), guarantees, financial assistance, income transfers, audits, fees, bonds, and royalties.
- (d) Departmental legal activities including, but not limited to, such things as arrests, investigations, patents, claims, and legal opinions. This does not include bringing judicial or administrative civil or criminal enforcement actions which are outside the scope of NEPA in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.18(a).
- (e) Nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities.
- (f) Routine and continuing government business, including such things as supervision, administration, operations, maintenance, renovations, and replacement activities having limited context and intensity (e.g., limited size and magnitude or short-term effects).
- (g) Management, formulation, allocation, transfer, and reprogramming of the Department's budget at all levels. (This does not exclude the preparation of environmental documents for proposals included in the budget when otherwise required.)
- (h) Legislative proposals of an administrative or technical nature (including such things as changes in authorizations for appropriations and minor boundary changes and land title transactions) or having primarily economic, social, individual, or institutional effects; and comments and reports on referrals of legislative proposals.
- (i) Policies, directives, regulations, and guidelines: that are of an administrative, financial, legal, technical, or procedural nature; or whose environmental effects are too broad, speculative, or conjectural to lend themselves to meaningful analysis and will later be subject to the NEPA process, either collectively or case-by-case.

- (j) Activities which are educational, informational, advisory, or consultative to other agencies, public and private entities, visitors, individuals, or the general public.
- (k) Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing, not to exceed 1,000 acres. Such activities:
 - (1) Shall be limited to areas—
 - (i) In wildland-urban interface; and
 - (ii) Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III, outside the wildland-urban interface;
 - (2) Shall be identified through a collaborative framework as described in “A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan;”
 - (3) Shall be conducted consistent with bureau and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans;
 - (4) Shall not be conducted in wilderness areas or impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation as wilderness; and
 - (5) Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and may include the sale of vegetative material if the primary purpose of the activity is hazardous fuels reduction. (Refer to the ESM Series for additional, required guidance.)
- (l) Post-fire rehabilitation activities not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration, heritage site restoration, repair of roads and trails, and repair of damage to minor facilities such as campgrounds) to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire. Such activities must comply with the following (Refer to the ESM Series for additional, required guidance.):
 - (1) Shall be conducted consistent with bureau and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans;
 - (2) Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and
 - (3) Shall be completed within three years following a wildland fire.

§ 46.215 Categorical exclusions: Extraordinary circumstances.

Extraordinary circumstances (see paragraph 46.205(c)) exist for individual actions within categorical exclusions that may meet any of the criteria listed in paragraphs (a) through (l) of this section. Applicability of extraordinary circumstances to categorical exclusions is determined by the Responsible Official.

- (a) Have significant impacts on public health or safety.
- (b) Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (EO 11990); floodplains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.

- (c) Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102(2)(E)].
- (d) Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.
- (e) Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.
- (f) Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.
- (g) Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau.
- (h) Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.
- (i) Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.
- (j) Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (EO 12898).
- (k) Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007).
- (l) Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and EO 13112).

§ 46.220 How to designate lead agencies.

- (a) In most cases, the Responsible Official should designate one Federal agency as the lead with the remaining Federal, State, tribal governments, and local agencies assuming the role of cooperating agency. In this manner, the other Federal, State, and local agencies can work to ensure that the NEPA document will meet their needs for adoption and application to their related decision(s).
- (b) In some cases, a non-Federal agency (including a tribal government) must comply with State or local requirements that are comparable to the NEPA requirements. In these cases, the Responsible Official may designate the non-Federal agency as a joint lead agency. (See 40 CFR 1501.5 and 1506.2 for a description of the selection of lead agencies, the settlement of lead agency disputes, and the use of joint lead agencies.)
- (c) In some cases, the Responsible Official may establish a joint lead relationship among several Federal agencies. If there is a joint lead, then one Federal agency must be identified as the agency responsible for filing the environmental impact statement with EPA.

§ 46.225 How to select cooperating agencies.

- (a) An “eligible governmental entity” is:
 - (1) Any Federal agency that is qualified to participate in the development of an environmental impact statement as provided for in 40 CFR 1501.6 and 1508.5 by virtue of its jurisdiction by law, as defined in 40 CFR 1508.15;

- (2) Any Federal agency that is qualified to participate in the development of an environmental impact statement by virtue of its special expertise, as defined in 40 CFR 1508.26; or
- (3) Any non-Federal agency (State, tribal, or local) with qualifications similar to those in paragraphs (a)(1) and (a)(2) of this section.
- (b) Except as described in paragraph (c) of this section, the Responsible Official for the lead bureau must invite eligible governmental entities to participate as cooperating agencies when the bureau is developing an environmental impact statement.
- (c) The Responsible Official for the lead bureau must consider any request by an eligible governmental entity to participate in a particular environmental impact statement as a cooperating agency. If the Responsible Official for the lead bureau denies a request, or determines it is inappropriate to extend an invitation, he or she must state the reasons in the environmental impact statement. Denial of a request or not extending an invitation for cooperating agency status is not subject to any internal administrative appeals process, nor is it a final agency action subject to review under the Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. 701 *et seq.*
- (d) Bureaus should work with cooperating agencies to develop and adopt a memorandum of understanding that includes their respective roles, assignment of issues, schedules, and staff commitments so that the NEPA process remains on track and within the time schedule. Memoranda of understanding must be used in the case of non-Federal agencies and must include a commitment to maintain the confidentiality of documents and deliberations during the period prior to the public release by the bureau of any NEPA document, including drafts.
- (e) The procedures of this section may be used for an environmental assessment.

§ 46.230 Role of cooperating agencies in the NEPA process.

In accordance with 40 CFR 1501.6, throughout the development of an environmental document, the lead bureau will collaborate, to the fullest extent possible, with all cooperating agencies concerning those issues relating to their jurisdiction and special expertise. Cooperating agencies may, by agreement with the lead bureau, help to do the following:

- (a) Identify issues to be addressed;
- (b) Arrange for the collection and/or assembly of necessary resource, environmental, social, economic, and institutional data;
- (c) Analyze data;
- (d) Develop alternatives;
- (e) Evaluate alternatives and estimate the effects of implementing each alternative; and
- (f) Carry out any other task necessary for the development of the environmental analysis and documentation.

§ 46.235 NEPA scoping process.

- (a) Scoping is a process that continues throughout the planning and early stages of preparation of an environmental impact statement. Scoping is required for an environmental impact statement; scoping may be helpful during preparation of an environmental assessment, but is not required (see paragraph 46.305(a) Public involvement in the environmental assessment process). For an environmental impact statement, bureaus must use scoping to engage State, local and tribal governments and the public in the

early identification of concerns, potential impacts, relevant effects of past actions and possible alternative actions. Scoping is an opportunity to introduce and explain the interdisciplinary approach and solicit information as to additional disciplines that should be included. Scoping also provides an opportunity to bring agencies and applicants together to lay the groundwork for setting time limits, expediting reviews where possible, integrating other environmental reviews, and identifying any major obstacles that could delay the process. The Responsible Official shall determine whether, in some cases, the invitation requirement in 40 CFR 1501.7(a)(1) may be satisfied by including such an invitation in the notice of intent (NOI).

- (b) In scoping meetings, newsletters, or by other communication methods appropriate to scoping, the lead agency must make it clear that the lead agency is ultimately responsible for determining the scope of an environmental impact statement and that suggestions obtained during scoping are only options for the bureau to consider.

§ 46.240 Establishing time limits for the NEPA process.

- (a) For each proposed action, on a case-by-case basis, bureaus shall:
 - (1) Set time limits from the start to the finish of the NEPA analysis and documentation, consistent with the requirements of 40 CFR 1501.8 and other legal obligations, including statutory and regulatory timeframes;
 - (2) Consult with cooperating agencies in setting time limits; and
 - (3) Encourage cooperating agencies to meet established time frames.
- (b) Time limits should reflect the availability of Department and bureau personnel and funds. Efficiency of the NEPA process is dependent on the management capabilities of the lead bureau, which must assemble an interdisciplinary team and/or qualified staff appropriate to the type of project to be analyzed to ensure timely completion of NEPA documents.

Subpart D—Environmental Assessments

§ 46.300 Purpose of an environmental assessment and when it must be prepared.

The purpose of an environmental assessment is to allow the Responsible Official to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact.

- (a) A bureau must ensure that an environmental assessment is prepared for all proposed Federal actions, except those:
 - (1) That are covered by a categorical exclusion;
 - (2) That are covered sufficiently by an earlier environmental document as determined and documented by the Responsible Official; or
 - (3) For which the bureau has already decided to prepare an environmental impact statement.
- (b) A bureau may prepare an environmental assessment for any proposed action at any time to:
 - (1) Assist in planning and decision-making;
 - (2) Further the purposes of NEPA when no environmental impact statement is necessary; or
 - (3) Facilitate environmental impact statement preparation.

§ 46.305 Public involvement in the environmental assessment process.

- (a) The bureau must, to the extent practicable, provide for public notification and public involvement when an environmental assessment is being prepared. However, the methods for providing public notification and opportunities for public involvement are at the discretion of the Responsible Official.
 - (1) The bureau must consider comments that are timely received, whether specifically solicited or not.
 - (2) Although scoping is not required, the bureau may apply a scoping process to an environmental assessment.
- (b) Publication of a “draft” environmental assessment is not required. Bureaus may seek comments on an environmental assessment if they determine it to be appropriate, such as when the level of public interest or the uncertainty of effects warrants, and may revise environmental assessments based on comments received without need of initiating another comment period.
- (c) The bureau must notify the public of the availability of an environmental assessment and any associated finding of no significant impact once they have been completed. Comments on a finding of no significant impact do not need to be solicited, except as required by 40 CFR 1501.4(e)(2).
- (d) Bureaus may allow cooperating agencies (as defined in § 46.225) to participate in developing environmental assessments.

§ 46.310 Contents of an environmental assessment.

- (a) At a minimum, an environmental assessment must include brief discussions of:
 - (1) The proposal;
 - (2) The need for the proposal;
 - (3) The environmental impacts of the proposed action;
 - (4) The environmental impacts of the alternatives considered; and
 - (5) A list of agencies and persons consulted.
- (b) When the Responsible Official determines that there are no unresolved conflicts about the proposed action with respect to alternative uses of available resources, the environmental assessment need only consider the proposed action and does not need to consider additional alternatives, including the no action alternative. (See section 102(2)(E) of NEPA).
- (c) In addition, an environmental assessment may describe a broader range of alternatives to facilitate planning and decision-making.
- (d) A proposed action or alternative(s) may include adaptive management strategies allowing for adjustment of the action during implementation. If the adjustments to an action are clearly articulated and pre-specified in the description of the alternative and fully analyzed, then the action may be adjusted during implementation without the need for further analysis. Adaptive management includes a monitoring component, approved adaptive actions that may be taken, and environmental effects analysis for the adaptive actions approved.
- (e) The level of detail and depth of impact analysis should normally be limited to the minimum needed to determine whether there would be significant environmental effects.

- (f) Bureaus may choose to provide additional detail and depth of analysis as appropriate in those environmental assessments prepared under paragraph 46.300(b).
- (g) An environmental assessment must contain objective analyses that support conclusions concerning environmental impacts.

§ 46.315 How to format an environmental assessment.

- (a) An environmental assessment may be prepared in any format useful to facilitate planning, decision-making, and appropriate public participation.
- (b) An environmental assessment may be accompanied by any other planning or decision-making document. The portion of the document that analyzes the environmental impacts of the proposal and alternatives must be clearly and separately identified and not spread throughout or interwoven into other sections of the document.

§ 46.320 Adopting environmental assessments prepared by another agency, entity, or person.

- (a) A Responsible Official may adopt an environmental assessment prepared by another agency, entity, or person, including an applicant, if the Responsible Official:
 - (1) Independently reviews the environmental assessment; and
 - (2) Finds that the environmental assessment complies with this subpart and relevant provisions of the CEQ Regulations and with other program requirements.
- (b) When appropriate, the Responsible Official may augment the environmental assessment to be consistent with the bureau's proposed action.
- (c) In adopting or augmenting the environmental assessment, the Responsible Official will cite the original environmental assessment.
- (d) The Responsible Official must ensure that its bureau's public involvement requirements have been met before it adopts another agency's environmental assessment.

§ 46.325 Conclusion of the environmental assessment process.

Upon review of the environmental assessment by the Responsible Official, the environmental assessment process concludes with one of the following:

- (1) A notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement;
- (2) A finding of no significant impact; or
- (3) A result that no further action is taken on the proposal.

Subpart E—Environmental Impact Statements

§ 46.400 Timing of environmental impact statement development.

The bureau must prepare an environmental impact statement for each proposed major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment before making a decision on whether to proceed with the proposed action.

§ 46.405 Remaining within page limits.

To the extent possible, bureaus should use techniques such as incorporation of referenced documents into NEPA analysis (46.135) and tiering (46.140) in an effort to remain within the normal page limits stated in 40 CFR 1502.7.

§ 46.415 Environmental impact statement content, alternatives, circulation and filing requirements.

The Responsible Official may use any environmental impact statement format and design as long as the statement is in accordance with 40 CFR 1502.10.

- (a) **Contents.** The environmental impact statement shall disclose:
 - (1) A statement of the purpose and need for the action;
 - (2) A description of the proposed action;
 - (3) The environmental impact of the proposed action;
 - (4) A brief description of the affected environment;
 - (5) Any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented;
 - (6) Alternatives to the proposed action;
 - (7) The relationship between local short-term uses of the human environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity;
 - (8) Any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented; and
 - (9) The process used to coordinate with other Federal agencies, State, tribal and local governments, and persons or organizations who may be interested or affected, and the results thereof.
- (b) **Alternatives.** The environmental impact statement shall document the examination of the range of alternatives (paragraph 46.420(c)). The range of alternatives includes those reasonable alternatives (paragraph 46.420(b)) that meet the purpose and need of the proposed action, and address one or more significant issues (40 CFR 1501.7(a)(2-3)) related to the proposed action. Since an alternative may be developed to address more than one significant issue, no specific number of alternatives is required or prescribed. In addition to the requirements in 40 CFR 1502.14, the Responsible Official has an option to use the following procedures to develop and analyze alternatives.
 - (1) The analysis of the effects of the no-action alternative may be documented by contrasting the current condition and expected future condition should the proposed action not be undertaken with the impacts of the proposed action and any reasonable alternatives.
 - (2) The Responsible Official may collaborate with those persons or organization that may be interested or affected to modify a proposed action and alternative(s) under consideration prior to issuing a draft environmental impact statement. In such cases the Responsible Official may consider these modifications as alternatives considered. Before engaging in any collaborative processes, the Responsible Official must consider the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) implications of such processes.

- (3) A proposed action or alternative(s) may include adaptive management strategies allowing for adjustment of the action during implementation. If the adjustments to an action are clearly articulated and pre-specified in the description of the alternative and fully analyzed, then the action may be adjusted during implementation without the need for further analysis. Adaptive management includes a monitoring component, approved adaptive actions that may be taken, and environmental effects analysis for the adaptive actions approved.

(c) ***Circulating and filing draft and final environmental impact statements.***

- (1) The draft and final environmental impact statements shall be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Federal Activities in Washington, DC (40 CFR 1506.9).
- (2) Requirements at 40 CFR 1506.9 "Filing requirements," 40 CFR 1506.10 "Timing of agency action," 40 CFR 1502.9 "Draft, final, and supplemental statements," and 40 CFR 1502.19 "Circulation of the environmental impact statement" shall only apply to draft, final, and supplemental environmental impact statements that are filed with EPA.

§ 46.420 Terms used in an environmental impact statement.

The following terms are commonly used to describe concepts or activities in an environmental impact statement:

- (a) ***Statement of purpose and need.*** In accordance with 40 CFR 1502.13, the statement of purpose and need briefly indicates the underlying purpose and need to which the bureau is responding.
 - (1) In some instances it may be appropriate for the bureau to describe its "purpose" and its "need" as distinct aspects. The "need" for the action may be described as the underlying problem or opportunity to which the agency is responding with the action. The "purpose" may refer to the goal or objective that the bureau is trying to achieve, and should be stated to the extent possible, in terms of desired outcomes.
 - (2) When a bureau is asked to approve an application or permit, the bureau should consider the needs and goals of the parties involved in the application or permit as well as the public interest. The needs and goals of the parties involved in the application or permit may be described as background information. However, this description must not be confused with the bureau's purpose and need for action. It is the bureau's purpose and need for action that will determine the range of alternatives and provide a basis for the selection of an alternative in a decision.
- (b) ***Reasonable alternatives.*** In addition to the requirements of 40 CFR 1502.14, this term includes alternatives that are technically and economically practical or feasible and meet the purpose and need of the proposed action.
- (c) ***Range of alternatives.*** This term includes all reasonable alternatives, or when there are potentially a very large number of alternatives then a reasonable number of examples covering the full spectrum of reasonable alternatives, each of which must be rigorously explored and objectively evaluated, as well as those other alternatives that are eliminated from detailed study with a brief discussion of the reasons for eliminating them. 40 CFR 1502.14. The Responsible Official must not consider alternatives beyond the range of alternatives discussed in the relevant environmental documents, but may select elements from several alternatives discussed. Moreover, the Responsible Official must, in fact, consider all the alternatives discussed in an environmental impact statement. 40 CFR 1505.1 (e).

- (d) **Preferred alternative.** This term refers to the alternative which the bureau believes would best accomplish the purpose and need of the proposed action while fulfilling its statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical, and other factors. It may or may not be the same as the bureau's proposed action, the non-Federal entity's proposal or the environmentally preferable alternative.

§ 46.425 Identification of the preferred alternative in an environmental impact statement.

- (a) Unless another law prohibits the expression of a preference, the draft environmental impact statement should identify the bureau's preferred alternative or alternatives, if one or more exists.
- (b) Unless another law prohibits the expression of a preference, the final environmental impact statement must identify the bureau's preferred alternative.

§ 46.430 Environmental review and consultation requirements.

- (a) Any environmental impact statement that also addresses other environmental review and consultation requirements must clearly identify and discuss all the associated analyses, studies, or surveys relied upon by the bureau as a part of that review and consultation. The environmental impact statement must include these associated analyses, studies, or surveys, either in the text or in an appendix or indicate where such analysis, studies or surveys may be readily accessed by the public.
- (b) The draft environmental impact statement must list all Federal permits, licenses, or approvals that must be obtained to implement the proposal. The environmental analyses for these related permits, licenses, and approvals should be integrated and performed concurrently. The bureau, however, need not unreasonably delay its NEPA analysis in order to integrate another agency's analyses. The bureau may complete the NEPA analysis before all approvals by other agencies are in place.

§ 46.435 Inviting comments.

- (a) A bureau must seek comment from the public as part of the Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement and notice of availability for a draft environmental impact statement;
- (b) In addition to paragraph (a) of this section, a bureau must request comments from:
 - (1) Federal agencies;
 - (2) State agencies through procedures established by the Governor of such state under EO 12372;
 - (3) Local governments and agencies, to the extent that the proposed action affects their jurisdictions; and
 - (4) The applicant, if any, and persons or organizations who may be interested or affected.
- (c) The bureau must request comments from the tribal governments, unless the tribal governments have designated an alternate review process, when the proposed action may affect the environment of either:
 - (1) Indian trust or restricted land; or
 - (2) Other Indian trust resources, trust assets, or tribal health and safety.
- (d) A bureau does not need to delay preparation and issuance of a final environmental impact statement when any Federal, State, and local agencies, or tribal governments from which comments must be obtained or requested do not comment within the prescribed time period.

§ 46.440 Eliminating duplication with State and local procedures.

A bureau must incorporate in its directives provisions allowing a State agency to jointly prepare an environmental impact statement, to the extent provided in 40 CFR 1506.2.

§ 46.445 Preparing a legislative environmental impact statement.

When required under 40 CFR 1506.8, the Department must ensure that a legislative environmental impact statement is included as a part of the formal transmittal of a legislative proposal to the Congress.

§ 46.450 Identifying the environmentally preferable alternative(s).

In accordance with the requirements of 40 CFR 1505.2, a bureau must identify the environmentally preferable alternative(s) in the record of decision. It is not necessary that the environmentally preferable alternative(s) be selected in the record of decision.